

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

CONTINUATION-IN-PART PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

VEHICLE FRONT-END QUICK CONNECT HITCH AND LIFT ASSEMBLY

BY

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"VEHICLE FRONT-END QUICK CONNECT HITCH AND LIFT ASSEMBLY"

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This is a Continuation-In-Part of United States Application
Serial No. 09/661,518 filed on September 13, 2000 which is
5 incorporated by reference herein.

Technical Field

This invention relates generally to vehicle hitches and more
particularly to a three point quick coupling hitch with an
electrically controlled hydraulic lift and fine tuning adjustments
10 for use on the front end of all terrain vehicles or the rigid frame
of other vehicles.

Background Information

All terrain vehicles are popular recreational vehicles but
with appropriate implements attached thereto they can serve as work
15 machines. For example with a blade or bucket attached they can
clear snow from walks or driveways or level earth. With grass
cutting attachments they can be used to keep large areas neatly
trimmed. Implements useable for the instant quick coupling hitch
include snow blowers, rotary tilling devices, rotary brushes,
20 seeders, front end mounted trenchers, yard excavators, push blade,
box scrapers, reel lawn mower, rotary lawn motor, saw bush cutting
systems and boom mowers, post drivers, posthole augers, drawbars
with specialty hitch attachments, vacuum systems, fork lifts,
platforms, and the like. Changing from one implement to the other
25 of a work vehicle and a recreational vehicle can be time consuming
or of sufficient annoyance that one often will not bother changing
for recreational purposes of short duration.

A number of patents are directed to frames for attaching

implements to all terrain vehicles (ATV's), or garden tractors for manipulating the attached implement thus indicating a need and various solutions in an attempt to meet that need. U.S. Patent No. 3,688,847 granted September 5, 1972 to P. Deeter and U.S. Patent 5,329,708 granted July 19, 1994 to M. Segorski disclose implement mounting frames that extend under the frame of the vehicle. This reduces the clearance of the vehicle thus reducing its ability to pass over obstacles. US Patent 5,967,241 granted October 19, 1999 to G. Gross and US Patent 5,615,745 granted April 1, 1997 to G Cross disclose lift mechanisms for the attached implement. The lifts are manually operated and thereby have obvious limitations including requiring dexterity of the operator as well as difficulties in positioning and repositioning the implement. US Patent 5,950,336 granted September 14, 1999 to K. Liebl addresses some of the concerns by providing a mounting frame with an electric lift. The frame is attached to the vehicle by two lever arms and a pin connection for each and is essentially permanently attached to the implement thus making difficult to substitute one implement for another.

US Patent 5,746,275 granted May 5, 1998 to G. Cross discloses a three point hitch that includes a plurality of pin connected links and an electric lift. The hitch attaches to the axle of the vehicle and therefore extends some distance from where the hitch attaches to the implement. The three point attachment is the connection of the hitch to the implement.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The hitch and lift assembly comprises a rigid, U-shape frame, a hydraulic jack unit, a coupler connecting one end of the hydraulic jack unit to a receiver on the ATV and an adjusting mechanism that connects the other end of the hydraulic jack unit to the U-shaped frame.

A preferred embodiment provides for a hitch and lift assembly for attaching an implement to a motorized vehicle having a rigid frame with horizontal and/or vertical cross members typically utilized in the support of ATV, garden tractors and the like. The hitch and lift assembly includes a crossbar member as a rigid link selectively adjustably connected to the ATV frame members by "U-clamps" or other means of attachment. The hitch and lift assembly also includes a generally U-shaped frame comprising a pair of elongated tubular members or legs spaced apart, aligned and connected in the front by a cross member near the ends of the legs which are formed having the distal ends define a pair of spaced apart cylindrical sockets opposite the distal ends of the legs being pivotally attached to the ATV or other vehicle frame. A rigid link defining a floating lockable cam provides limited arcuate movement relative to the frame and includes means limiting the arcuate movement. The hitch and lift assembly also includes an electric powered extendible and retractable power driven jack unit connected at one end thereof to said rigid link defining the floating cam. Means for connecting the distal ends of the legs to the motorized vehicle consists of a pair of removable pins cooperatively engaging the implement or apparatus to be lifted.

Moreover, the hitch and adapter assembly for connecting an implement to the frame of the front end of vehicles such as all terrain vehicle provides a rigid connection with limited motion for reduced vibration operation. The hitch has two spaced apart sockets on a rigid frame that pivotally connects to the vehicle providing a rigid extension thereof. The sockets receive and cooperatively engage respective pins on the implement providing a quick connection. The electrically powered hydraulic cylinder is connected at one end to the frame and the other end connects to the vehicle by a coupler that slip fits into a socket therefore on the vehicle. The frame pivotally connects to the vehicle at two spaced apart positions. There is a coarse and fine adjustment for varying the height and tilt positions of the implement.

A principal object of the present invention is to provide a simple, robust adjustable front-end quick connect hitch and lift assembly for a vehicle such as a tractor or more particularly an all terrain vehicle, ("ATV").

5 A principal object of the present invention is to provide a hitch as above described that is usable to connect a variety of implements to the vehicle.

10 A further principal object of the present invention is to provide a three point hitch for an ATV with a quick connect/disconnect connection to the implement.

It is another object to provide a floating cam link which includes coarse adjustments, fine adjustments, and means for locking the floating cam into position in order to provide downward pressure via the electric hydraulic jack.

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A better understanding of the present invention will be had upon reference to the following description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views and wherein:

20 Figure 1 is a side oblique view of an all terrain vehicle with a blade attached thereto by a hitch and lifting assembly provided in accordance with the present invention;

25 Figure 2 is an exploded, oblique view of the hitch and lifting assembly shown in Figure 1;

Figure 3 is an exploded top plan of the hitch and lifting assembly;

Figure 4 is an exploded view of the hitch and lifting assembly taken essentially along line 4-4 of Figure 3;

Figure 5 is an alternate embodiment of the present invention showing an exploded, oblique view of the hitch and lifting assembly and the receiver mounted to the crossbar;

Figure 6 is an alternate embodiment of the present invention showing an exploded, oblique view of the hitch and lifting assembly and the relocation of the cam lock secured to the top of the cam link and extending over the top edge of the lugs on each side thereof providing means for locking the floating cam and exerting downward pressure via the hydraulic jack; and

Figure 7 is an exploded view of the hitch and lifting assembly taken essentially along line 4-4 of Figure 3, wherein the cam lock is secured to the top of the cam link by a knob and threaded stud including a bracket extending over the top edges of the lugs for locking the floating cam.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to the drawings there is illustrated a conventional all terrain vehicle (ATV) 10 with a blade 20 attached to the front thereof by a hitch 30 provided in accordance with the present invention. The blade 20 maybe used to clear snow or move earth and is by way of example of an implement attachable to the vehicle. Of course, it is contemplated that any implement set forth heretofore could be substituted for the blade 20. The ATV has an open protective rigid grill 12 on the front comprising a weldment of a pair of generally vertical tubular members 13 as shown in Figure 2 which is a typical arrangement for tubing members forming a part of the ATV frame. The grill 12 is part of the vehicle 10 and is rigidly attached to and forms a part of the vehicle frame.

Means for holding such as a pair of "U" clamps 15 attach a horizontally disposed longitudinal crossbar 16 to the two vertically disposed tubular frame members 13 that are part of the rigid grill 12. The crossbar 16 has a means for pivotally detachable engagement defining a threaded hole 17 in opposing distal ends thereof, each one for receiving one of a pair of hitch mounting bolts 19 thereby pivotally connecting a frame portion of the hitch supported by the tubular frame members 13 to the vehicle 10.

The hitch and lift assembly 30 comprises a rigid, U-shape frame 31, a hydraulic jack unit 32, a coupler 33 connecting one end of the hydraulic jack unit 32 to a receiver 18 on the ATV and an adjusting mechanism 34 that connects the other end of the hydraulic jack unit 32 to the U-shaped frame 31.

The receiver 18 is a rectangular or square shaped socket attached to a horizontal or vertical lower frame member of the ATV and conventionally is used for trailer couplings. Alternately, a receiver plate 40 as shown in Figure 5 connecting to and extending upward perpendicular to the receiver 18 having means for attachment such as holes therein can be attached to the crossbar 16 by aligning the holes therein and inserting bolts therethrough. It is contemplated that the receiver 18 and corresponding sized and shaped coupling 33 can be any selected size and shape, and that the receiver 18 could be connected to the hitch and lift assembly 30 and the coupler could be connected to the frame of the ATV. In the preferred embodiment, the receiver 18 is located on the vehicle at an elevation thereon lower than where the crossbar 16 is located on the grill. The receiver 18 and the bolts 19 cooperatively engaging the two threaded holes 17 in the distal end crossbar provide a three point connection of the hitch 30 to the vehicle 10.

As shown in Figure 5, the cross member 16 includes as an

option one or more vertical holes 83 therethrough. The receiver 18 includes one or more holes through the top surface. A knob 80 having a stud 82 extending therefrom can be disposed through a hole 83 in the cross member 16 so that the stud extends downward through a threaded hole 84 in the receiver 18 for cooperative engagement with the coupler 33 to secure the coupler in fixed position to reduce play and increase structural support and rigidity of the hitch and lift assembly.

The rigid U-shaped frame 31 comprises a pair of spaced apart parallel elongate tubular members 31A interconnected adjacent one end thereof by a cross member 31B, and having the distal ends 42 crimped substantially flat forming a lug 31C at the distal ends having a through hole 31D alignable with the horizontally disposed longitudinal crossbar 16. The distal ends 44 of tubular members 31A remain open providing cylindrical sockets 31E for receiving respective pair of pins 21 or short support members secured to and projecting from the implement such as a blade 20. The blade 20 or other implement of the preferred embodiment uses pins 21 having horizontal holes therethrough for mounting in alignment with holes disposed within a pair of mounting brackets 46 formed by aligning spaced apart flanges 48 connected to the back of the blade 20. The pins 21 may be rigidly connected to the mounting brackets 46, or pivotally connected thereto by bolts cooperatively engaging the flanges 48 and pins 21. In the preferred embodiment, the tubular member 31A is reinforced by an annular collar 31F. Each pin 21 has an annular groove 22 that cooperates with a knob and screw 31G threaded into a threaded fitting insert 50 formed in one or more selected positions along the top of the tubular member 31A to lock the implement to the hitch and lift assembly 30. The groove 22 and threaded knob are in alignment when the pin 21 is fully inserted into the cylindrical socket 31E.

It is readily apparent the blade 20 implement can be quickly connected and disconnected respectively simply by hand tightening or loosening, as the case maybe, the two knobs with screws 31G. This makes it easy to switch from one vehicle function to another or from one implement to another and all that is necessary is that the various implements have two parallel pins 21 secured thereto corresponding in size and spacing to the two sockets 31E provided by the tubular members 31A. Obviously locking pins or other means of holding in aligned notches or holes can be substituted for the knob and screw implement lock 31G.

As best shown in Figure 3, the longitudinal tubular members 31A are pivotally attached to the crossbar 16 by respective ones of a pair of threaded mounting bolts 19 on which there is an outer thrust bushing 19A and an inboard support bushing 19B. The support bushing 19B has a sleeve portion 19C that slip fits into the hole 31D in the lug 31C and it is lubricated via grease fitting 31H.

The coupler 33 is Z-shaped having a first generally horizontal short distal end member 33A corresponding in cross-sectional outline shape to the socket of the receiver 18 for slip fit therein. A generally vertical center section member 33H is rigidly attached to the distal end member 33A and extends downwardly a selected distance and is pivotally connected to a second distal end member 33B. The opposing end of the second distal end member 33B is a U-shaped portion for pivotally receiving a lower end connecting mount of a hydraulic cylinder 32A of the hydraulic jack unit 32. The hydraulic jack 32 of the preferred embodiment is electric; however, it is contemplated that pressured fluid or air from a hydrostatic system or pump, respectively, could be used to actuate the hydraulic jack. Moreover, it is contemplated that a rack and pinion assembly can be substituted for or used with the

hydraulic jack, although it is less efficient and more bulky. A pin 32E connects the cylinder 32A to the opposing end of the second distal end member 33B of the coupler 33 by alignment and cooperative engagement of holes formed within the distal end member 33B and cylinder 32A. The distal end of the piston rod of the hydraulic jack unit 32 includes a connecting yoke having a hole therethrough for pivotally connecting to the corresponding aligned yoke holes of the adjusting mechanism unit 34 by a pin 32D.

The unit 32 includes the above mentioned hydraulic cylinder and to power the same there is an electric motor 32B drivingly connected to a hydraulic pump 32C. A control and power cable 32J extends from the motor 32B and connects to a control switch 52 conveniently located on the handle bar in close proximity to the hand grip, and is also connected to the power supply on the vehicle 10.

The adjusting mechanism 34 includes a first coarse adjusting means 54 and a second fine adjusting means 56. The coarse adjusting mechanism 54 includes a floating cam or link 34A pivotally connected at one end by the pin 32D to the distal end or yoke of the piston rod of hydraulic jack unit 32 and the other end of the link 34A projects between a pair of lugs 34B defining projections or mounting plates rigidly anchored to and projecting from the frame cross member 31B. The lugs 34B have a series of holes 34C for selectively adjusting the angle and distance of the piston rod pivotally connecting thereto. A bolt or pin 34D passes through one of the holes and a hole in the link 34A providing a loose connection. With this loose connection there is relative movement between the lugs 34B and the link 34A and such motion is pivotal movement of the respective members about the pin 34D. The pin 34D is lubricated via a grease fitting.

A cam lock arm 34E is notched at one end as indicated at 34F

and the other end overlaps one of the lugs 34B. A shaft 34G passes through a hole in the lock arm 34E intermediate the ends thereof and is threaded into a threaded bore in the link 34A. A hand grip knob 34H on the shaft 34G provides means to manually lock and
5 unlock the cam of link 34A by turning the knob to increase or decrease, as the case maybe, the frictional grip of the lock arm 34E on the lug 34B.

Alternately, the knob and stud 34H can be disengaged from the vertical threaded bore of the floating cam link 34A. The cam lock
10 34E can be removed therefrom. A threaded bore 60 can be formed in the top of the floating cam link 34A whereby the cam lock 34 E can be disposed horizontally across the top edge of the lug 34B and secured thereto with the knob and stud 34H to create a positive lock for creating down pressure for selected applications.

The fine adjusting mechanism 56 comprises a stud 34H threaded into a vertically threaded hole 34J adjacent an end of the link 34A and foot plate 34K on the end of the stud 34H bears against the longitudinal cross member 31B. A hand grip knob 34L provides means to manually turn the stud 34H providing the fine adjustment. A
15 lever 34M threaded on the stud 34H is used to lock the stud 34H in position, by binding against the link 34A, at the desired position.
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Figure 6 shows the relocation of the cam lock 34E secured to the top of the cam link 34 secured thereto by a knob and threaded stud 70 cooperatively engaging a threaded bore 72 drilled into the
25 top of the cam link 34 and having a bracket 73 extending over the top edges of the lugs 34B on each side thereof providing means for locking the floating cam 34 and for exerting downward pressure via the hydraulic jack unit 32.

The hitch and lift assembly of the present invention can be

utilized with any type of vehicle as a coupling hitch include snow
blowers, rotary tilling devices, rotary brushes, seeders, front end
mounted trenchers, yard excavators, push blade, box scrapers, reel
5 lawn mower, rotary lawn motor, saw bush cutting systems and boom
mowers, post drivers, posthole augers, drawbars with specialty
hitch attachments, vacuum systems, fork lifts, platforms, and the
like. Although it is possible to utilize such the present device
in place of a hydraulic unit of a tractor or the like, the
10 advantages exhibited by the instant invention are better realized
when utilized on the front end of a vehicle utilizing the electric
hydraulic jack providing a compact, quick disconnect lifting device
independently of high pressure hydraulic fluid systems.

The foregoing detailed description is given primarily for
clearness of understanding and no unnecessary limitations are to be
15 understood therefrom, for modifications will become obvious to
those skilled in the art based upon more recent disclosures and may
be made without departing from the spirit of the invention and
scope of the appended claims.